



The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

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November 8, 2013

COMMENTS OF THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

On behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation ("Tribe"), a federally recognized Indian Tribe, please accept the following comments on the E-Rate NPRM, proceeding 13-184. Specifically, the Tribe would like to address the FCC proposed rule changes to E-rate funding for Tribal communities. The Tribe has first-hand experience with E-Rate funding, and in particular one of our tribal programs, Pascal Sherman Indian School (PSIS), has benefited greatly from it. The Tribe strongly believes that the E-rate funding serves a critical need in Indian Country, and should be made more broadly available.

The Tribe urges the FCC to amend the E-rate funding to provide (1) priority for tribal communities (2) elimination of the 2-5 year rule for priority 1 submission for tribes; (3) reapplication must be completed every three years instead of annually; and (4) increased training on form completion and submission.

The public schools located within the boundaries of the Colville Indian Reservations have been significantly underserved in regards to technology. Providing priority for tribal communities and eliminating the 2-5 year rule for priority 1 submission for tribes could help schools on the Colville Indian Reservation reach their full potential. Currently, many of the schools are limited to just one T1 phone line communication through CLEC providers. These T1 lines are very outdated, and extremely slow, which limits the ability of the schools to fully utilize and participate in the wealth of educational programming available through the internet. As a result, the quality of education in these schools suffers. FCC National Broadband Plan defines acceptable high speed broadband at 4mbps/s download and 1mbps/s upload. Currently, only 6 of the 14 schools located on the Colville Indian Reservation have access to this speed.

The proposal to create a tribal priority would provide the Tribe with an opportunity to expand high speed connectivity in our schools, medical facilities, and libraries. The Tribe has found that obtaining other grant or private sector funding for this purpose has been difficult. Further, creating a tribal priority will help the tribes expand their sovereignty by providing them with an opportunity to build, own, and maintain their own infrastructure and gain additional technical expertise.

Further, it is imperative that the FCC review the 2 in 5 rule which limits tribes to submitting two priority one application filings per five years. Because of the significant need for E-rate funding within

tribal communities, the ability to file two priority one filings in a five year period is insufficient. For example, in the case of the Colville Tribes there are 14 schools, 4 libraries, 2 clinics, and approximately 5600 tribal members. While the Tribe is aggressively pursuing economic development strategies, currently a significant portion of the Reservation is identified as impoverished. In some cases, tribal infrastructure is so underdeveloped that it takes more than five years to develop appropriate infrastructure. Establishment of a tribal priority would allow the Tribe to create a five year technical plan to meet these unmet needs that would be cost effective. Such a plan would drastically improve the quality of life for those living on the Colville Indian Reservation, and enhance our schools, clinics, libraries, and hospitals.

Currently, tribes are required to reapply for the E-rate funding annually. Due to lack of staff, financial limitations, and changing leadership, it is challenging for tribes to assess their needs on an annual basis. Accordingly, the annual reapplication requirement, which is based on a needs assessment, harms tribes and forces them to rely on external vendors who often have preconceived notions of tribal needs. Requiring renewal every three years would better serve the needs of tribal nations, and would provide tribes a chance to work with vendors on a longer term scale to develop tribally generated needs assessments and prioritization.

Finally, training for tribal communities in how to apply for E-Rate funding is an unmet need. Without proper training, tribes are unable to fully benefit from the E-Rate program. The application process is extremely complex, and as a result many tribes may lack staff with the skills to complete the application process. Lack of tribal participation defeats the purpose of the program, which is to allocate funds where they are needed. Tribes will be better positioned to take advantage of E Rate funding if they are provided with training and assistance

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and look forward to finalization of the E-Rate rule.

Sincerely,



Jim Rohyak, Chief information Office
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation